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FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1331
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TBILISI 000679

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: OPPOSITION PLANS FOR APRIL 9 PROTESTS
MOVE FORWARD

REF: A. TBILISI 660
[1](#)B. TBILISI 657
[1](#)C. TBILISI 618
[1](#)D. TBILISI 585

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary/Comment: Barring unforeseen circumstances, planned protests on April 9 will proceed as scheduled. We expect turnout to be substantial, probably numbering in the tens of thousands, but likely less than the 150,000-200,000 some non-parliamentary opposition figures have estimated. While April 9 could be a sizable protest, we believe forecasted poor weather and the orthodox holy week, which begins April 12, to quickly thin out the crowds making a long-term, large scale protest unlikely. While the GoG and protest organizers agree that violence does not benefit either side politically, both sides remain wary of the others intentions. The OSCE/UNDP-led Ambassador's working group will issue a statement April 8 calling on all sides to avoid violence, and a Department-issued statement making the same points would be welcome. The Public Defenders Office plans on placing clearly identifiable volunteers from reputable NGO's as observers into the crowd which should help diffuse tensions and provide unbiased monitoring. The GoG continues to maintain that it will allow the protests to continue as long as they are peaceful. The MOIA has also invited international observers into the MOIA command center to monitor its actions. GoG officials appear concerned about potential violence, but not unduly worried. Post, GoG officials, and many in the non-parliamentary opposition believe that President Saakashvili will not resign under any circumstances no matter how large or protracted the protests.

[1](#)2. (C) For its part, the non-parliamentary opposition, instead of coming together to some sort of agreement on tactics and long-term strategy, appears further apart than ever. The feeling among the non-parliamentary opposition ranges from gloom, as to the short and long term fortunes of the non-parliamentary movement in general, to an almost religious-like belief that Saakashvili will immediately resign on April 9. The GoG has been very active both publicly and privately in offering dialogue and concrete concessions such as direct mayoral elections in Tbilisi. Despite the offers, the non-parliamentary opposition has openly mocked the GoG's attempts at dialogue. With some justification (given some past actions), the non-parliamentary opposition does not trust the GoG to negotiate in good faith. However, the unwillingness to negotiate, maximalist demands, and often condescending tone in public and in private, coupled with little apparent thought as to how the opposition's chosen course of action affects Georgia (for good or for bad) overall, have backed the non-parliamentary opposition into a corner. Clearly, by pursuing an all or nothing approach, the non-parliamentary opposition hopes it will have more political leverage after April 9. Admittedly, the members have not agreed on any potential demands (other than Saakashvili's immediate resignation) nor a coherent plan to take advantage of any additional political leverage. If the protests quickly wane,

the non-parliamentary opposition stands to be further diminished as a political force limiting its bargaining power with the GoG, and with little politically to offer the public other than further protests. End Summary/Comment.

April 9 Protests Planned Without a Clear Political Vision or Leader

13. (C) As of April 7, all the major non-parliamentary parties and leaders plan to protest on April 9, however; parties and leaders plan to protest on April 9, however; there is no consensus as to what steps will follow. Irakli Alasani's Alliance for Georgia ("Alliance") has dropped its plan to protest for only one day (ref C). The Alliance is unsure how long it will protest, with David Gamkrelidze saying he hoped he would be done by Orthodox Palm Sunday (April 12). The Labour Party expects to participate for one day, but will be "independent" from the other protesters. It views joining a group with Nino Burjanadze anathema to its very existence, and finds the demand for Saakashvili's resignation unconstitutional. Former Presidential Candidate Levan Gachicheladze vows to protest until Saakashvili resigns and is joined by other more radical leaders like Kakha Kukava (Conservatives), Eka Beselia (Georgia's Way - Okruashvili's nominal party), Koba Davitashvili (Party of the People) and other lesser figures. Nino Burjanadze and Salome Zourabichvili's intentions are less clear. So far, no figure has emerged as a leader of the fractious non-parliamentary groups.

14. (C) More unsettling is that the non-parliamentary opposition has been unable to articulate a constitutional manner of effecting regime change, and appear to have no plan

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to fill the power vacuum should their demand succeed. Post has seen little evidence that potential non-parliamentary leader Irakli Alasania (Alliance) has been able to influence the non-parliamentary opposition to moderate its tone or demands. On the contrary, it appears the radicals have influenced Alasania to be much more radical in his public rhetoric and demands. Various non-parliamentary opposition figures openly express their disdain for each other in private. The personality clashes between the various leaders further limit any potential cohesion leaving the non-parliamentary opposition a largely rudderless, mishmash of ideologically diverse parties looking for protests on April 9 to force Saakashvili from power. Thus far, no non-parliamentary leader has come up with a "Plan B".

Violence Eschewed by All but Both Sides Are Wary

15. (C) The Ambassador has told numerous GoG interlocutors, non-parliamentary opposition members and the media that violence should be avoided and dialogue is a necessity. Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Bokeria reaffirmed to the Ambassador April 6 that the GoG has no intention of using force and will allow the protesters to carry on indefinitely as long as they remain peaceful. Bokeria feared that some protesters would storm a Government building to force the GoG to respond. Bokeria told the Ambassador that the GoG would have to respond to such an act, but he hoped (along with his colleagues) that any confrontation, even legitimate to protect the safety of the crowd or government property could be avoided. Bokeria also expressed his fear that a rump group of protesters would physically attempt to block access to government building to initiate scuffles. Other GoG officials have told Post on numerous occasions that they had no intention of using force, noting that any use of force would be politically damaging to them both inside and outside Georgia. Additionally, the Public Defenders Office has authorized NGO volunteers and staff to monitor the crowd in small groups. Observers will wear a "uniform" and sign a code of conduct outlining their duties and responsibilities in order to be accredited. (Comment: Post believes this initiative will be helpful in having more eyes on the crowd

to discourage and/or quickly identify those engaged in unlawful behavior. End Comment.)

¶6. (C) For their part, non-parliamentary opposition members have all expressed their desire to maintain a peaceful, orderly protest. Kakha Kukava (Conservatives) has worked out a deal with the MOIA to be in constant contact to ensure open lines of communication between the protesters and the GoG are available. Nino Burjanadze mentioned that she would bring her own "security" people, dressed in easily identifiable white T-shirts to help police her own supporters. The Ambassador strongly suggested that Burjanadze try to set up a channel of communication with the MOIA to which she agreed. The non-parliamentary opposition also seems to have made the calculation that anything other than peaceful protests would be politically damaging. In discussions, non-parliamentary leaders mention impending government "provocations" but as of yet, have not provided any details or credible evidence to back up their assertions. Post has been told of some incidents of GoG intimidation or even beatings of supporters by the GoG. The Ambassador has personally followed up with the MOIA and other government organs on each alleged incident (Ref D). (Embassy Note: As of now, we are unable to comment Q(Ref D). (Embassy Note: As of now, we are unable to comment on the veracity of the claims but will continue to track investigations into the incidents. End Note.)

GOG Makes Numerous Offers but Position Hardening

¶7. (C) Both publicly and privately, the GoG has reached out to non-parliamentary leaders with offers of dialogue and compromise. The offer includes dialogue on constitutional and other reforms (Ref C). Tbilisi mayor Gigi Ugalava stated in an interview that he favored direct mayoral elections in 2010 to coincide with local elections (slated to be held in fall 2010, but likely to be moved up to spring). (Embassy Note: Post had heard that the GoG had offered the deal privately to the non-parliamentary opposition a week or so previous to the announcement. End Note.). Privately, the GoG indicated that pre-term parliamentary elections could be discussed, but only in 2010 at the earliest. Thus far the non-parliamentary opposition has rebuffed all offers. Bokeria again told the Ambassador that the GoG was open to dialogue but stated that he did not believe the non-parliamentary opposition had any desire to negotiate. Bokeria expressed his belief that the non-parliamentary opposition would wait until April 9, then demand the terms that were previously on the table. Bokeria succinctly stated that every political actor faced consequences for his or her decisions. Bokeria stated that the non-parliamentary opposition clearly thought that pursuing protests gave it more leverage, but would have to deal with reality if they

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miscalculated. Bokeria said offers were still on the table but was not optimistic of any sort of agreement.

Non-parliamentary Opposition Rejects Dialogue

¶8. (C) While the non-parliamentary opposition leaders have stated they are open to dialogue, not a single leader has indicated to Post they are currently willing to speak with the GoG. The common theme is that they will not negotiate with President Saakashvili because he has no credibility. When asked about working with Minister for the Penitentiary, Probation, and Legal Assistance Dima Shashkin, David Gamkrelidze and Nino Burjanadze separately called the proposition a "joke" (Ref A). Others have publicly mocked the initiative. When pushed, Gamkrelidze said he would speak with Saakashvili but only at the Patriarch's residence with international observers. Other non-parliamentary leaders echo the sentiment. Non-parliamentary opposition leaders alternate between saying they cannot work with anybody but Saakashvili because he is the sole decision-maker in Georgia to saying they cannot work with Saakashvili because he has no credibility, all the while maintaining an "openness" to

dialogue. It seems that most of the non-parliamentary opposition has no intention of engaging in any dialogue before April 9.

Business Leaders Fret - Patriarch Calls for Peace and Restraint

¶9. (C) Perhaps sensing the public mood, the Patriarch Ilia II called for a peaceful protest rally and hoped that all parties would exercise restraint and wisdom and has privately advised many with the same message (Ref B). Numerous business leaders have expressed their frustration at the non-parliamentary opposition, growing tired of protests without policy. A business person told econoff that the resignation of Saakashvili would be a disaster for the Georgian economy and said that many in the non-parliamentary opposition were simply a bunch of power-hungry opportunists. Two representatives for Rakia Free Industrial Zone (both of whom claimed they would support Alasania if elections were held) said the only thing potential investors asked about was political stability and did so over and over again. Both representatives stated that the current political situation with seemingly unending protests was bad for business.

Number Estimates Vary - Weather As A Factor - Holy Week

¶10. (C) Most non-parliamentary opposition leaders are predicting roughly 100,000 - 150,000 protesters for the April 9 rally. GoG estimates are usually around 25,000 to perhaps 50,000 maximum with the caveat that even if there are 200,000, no GoG official would resign as a result. Considering that only 80-100,000 were in the street after Shevernadze resigned during the Rose Revolution and roughly 50,000 turned out for the November 7, 2007 protests, the non-parliamentary opposition numbers seem optimistic. Non-parliamentary opposition leaders might have already set a trap for themselves by their own rhetoric, where 75,000 could be labeled a failure. As of now, the weather forecast is predicting a likelihood of rain every day from Wednesday, April 8 until Sunday, April 12 which is Orthodox Palm Sunday and the beginning of orthodox Holy Week. If the weather prediction holds, rain and religious holidays might dissuade many from joining the protest, at least for an extended period.
TEFFT